

Regular Turán numbers

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Latest update on 2019–10–30

Abstract

The regular Turán number of a graph F , denoted by $\text{rex}(n, F)$, is the largest number of edges in a regular graph G of order n such that G does not contain subgraphs isomorphic to F . Giving a partial answer to a recent problem raised by Gerbner et al. [arXiv:1909.04980] we prove that $\text{rex}(n, F)$ asymptotically equals the (classical) Turán number whenever the chromatic number of F is at least four; but it is substantially different for some 3-chromatic graphs F if n is odd.

1 Introduction

Let F be a fixed ‘forbidden’ graph. We denote

- $\text{ex}(n, F)$ the maximum number of edges in a graph of order n that does not contain F as a subgraph — the classical *Turán number*;
- $\text{rex}(n, F)$ the maximum number of edges in a *regular* graph of order n that does not contain F as a subgraph — the *regular Turán number*.

Of course $\text{rex}(n, F) \leq \text{ex}(n, F)$ holds for every F by definition.

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The Turán number of graphs is one of the most famous functions of graph theory, and it is well known to satisfy

$$\text{ex}(n, K_{r+1}) = \binom{n}{2} - \sum_{i=0}^{r-1} \binom{\lfloor \frac{n+i}{r} \rfloor}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{ex}(n, F) = (1 + o(1)) \text{ex}(n, K_{\chi(F)})$$

for all F with chromatic number $\chi(F) = r+1 \geq 3$, by the celebrated theorems of Turán¹ [11] and Erdős and Stone [7].

The regular Turán number was introduced recently by Gerbner, Patkós, Vizer, and the second author in [8], motivated by the study of singular Turán numbers introduced in [4]. It was proved in [8] that

- $\text{rex}(n, K_3)$ is not a monotone function of n as $\text{rex}(n, K_3) = \text{ex}(n, K_3) = n^2/4$ if n is even, while

$$\text{rex}(n, K_3) \leq 2n^2/5$$

if n is odd, the latter derived from a theorem of Andrásfai [2], which we shall present in details later as well as some recent progress motivated by this theorem;

- there exists a quadratic lower bound on $\text{rex}(n, F)$ whenever $\chi(F) \geq 3$, namely

$$\text{rex}(n, F) \geq n^2/(g+6) - O(n)$$

where g is the length of a shortest *odd* cycle in F (that is, the *odd girth* of F);

- if $\chi(F) = r+1 \geq 3$ and n is a multiple of r , then

$$\text{rex}(n, F) = (1 + o(1)) \text{ex}(n, F)$$

as $n \rightarrow \infty$, by the regularity of the Turán graph;

- if F is a tree on $p+1$ vertices and $\text{ex}(n, F) \leq (p-1)n/2$, then $\text{ex}(n, F) = \text{rex}(n, F)$ for every n divisible by p .

¹The unique extremal graph for K_{r+1} — the *Turán graph*, often denoted by $T_{n,r}$ — is obtained by partitioning the n vertices into r classes as equally as possible (each class has $\lfloor n/r \rfloor$ or $\lceil n/r \rceil$ vertices), and two vertices are adjacent if and only if they belong to distinct classes.

Problem 4.2 of [8] asks to determine $\liminf \text{rex}(n, F)/n^2$ for non-bipartite graphs F . The goal of our present note is to solve this problem for a large class of graphs F , as expressed in the following results.

Theorem 1 *Let $r \geq 3$.*

- (i) *If n is a multiple of r , then $\text{rex}(n, K_{r+1}) = \text{ex}(n, K_{r+1})$.*
- (ii) *If n is not a multiple of r , then $\text{rex}(n, K_{r+1}) = \text{ex}(n, K_{r+1}) - \Theta(n)$ as $n \rightarrow \infty$.*
- (iii) *More exactly, if $n = qr + s$ with $1 \leq s \leq r - 2$, and at least one of $r - s$ and q is even, then*

$$\text{rex}(n, K_{r+1}) = \text{ex}(n, K_{r+1}) - \frac{(r - s)q}{2}.$$

- (iv) *If F is any graph with $\chi(F) \geq 4$, then $\text{rex}(n, F) = (1 - o(1)) \text{ex}(n, F)$.*
- (v) *For $n = 3k + s$ with $s = 0, 1, 2$ we have $\text{rex}(n, K_4) = kn = n \cdot \lfloor \frac{n}{3} \rfloor$.*

Theorem 2 *Let F be a 3-chromatic graph.*

- (i) *If n is even, then $\text{rex}(n, F) = (1 - o(1)) \text{ex}(n, F) = n^2/4 + o(n^2)$; moreover, $\text{rex}(n, K_3) = \text{rex}(n, K_4 - e) = n^2/4$.*
- (ii) *If n is odd, and $F = K_3$ or $F = K_4 - e$ or F is a unicyclic graph with C_3 as its cycle, then $\text{rex}(n, F) = n^2/5 - O(n)$.*
- (iii) *If $F = K_3$ and $n = 5k + s$ is odd, then $\text{rex}(n, F) = kn = n \cdot \lfloor \frac{n}{5} \rfloor$.*

Theorem 3 *If $\chi(F) = 3$, and F has odd girth g , then*

$$\text{rex}(n, F) \geq n^2/(g + 2) - O(n)$$

for every odd n . Moreover, if $F = C_5$ or F is a unicyclic graph with C_5 as its cycle, then the asymptotic equality

$$\text{rex}(n, F) = n^2/7 - O(n)$$

is valid. More precisely, if $n = 7k + s$ is odd, and n is sufficiently large with respect to F , then $\text{rex}(n, F) = kn = n \cdot \lfloor \frac{n}{7} \rfloor$.

It should be noted that almost nothing is known about the behavior of $\text{rex}(n, F)$ in case of bipartite graphs F , apart from a couple of remarks in the concluding section of [8]. Moreover, the following problem remains widely open for 3-chromatic graphs.

Problem 1 *Determine $\text{rex}(n, F)$, or its asymptotic growth as $n \rightarrow \infty$, for graphs F with $\chi(F) = 3$ for odd n .*

As a particular case, we expect that the exact results on K_3 and C_5 extend to a unified formula for every odd cycle.

Conjecture 1 *If $g \geq 3$ and $n = k(g + 2) + s$ with $0 \leq s \leq g + 1$, and both g and n are odd, then $\text{rex}(n, C_g) = kn = n \cdot \lfloor \frac{n}{g+2} \rfloor$.*

The unicyclic extensions given in Theorems 2 and 3 are consequences of the following principle. It has an analogous implication also for those graphs whose unique non-trivial block is $K_4 - e$.

Proposition 1 *If the growth of $\text{rex}(n, F)$ is superlinear in n , and F^+ is a graph obtained from F by inserting a pendant vertex, then $\text{rex}(n, F^+) = \text{rex}(n, F)$ for every sufficiently large n .*

At the end of this introduction let us recall the full statement of Andrásfai's theorem, which plays an essential role in the current context.

Theorem 4 ([2]) *If G is a triangle-free graph on n vertices and with minimum degree $\delta(G) > 2n/5$, then G is bipartite.*

This theorem is the source of motivation for recent research which is also related and relevant to our Theorem 3 and Conjecture 1; see [1, 6, 9, 10]. We explicitly quote the following very useful generalization, proved by Andrásfai, Erdős, and T. Sós, as read out from the combination of their Theorem 1.1 and Remark 1.6.

Theorem 5 ([3]) *For each odd integer $k \geq 5$ and each integer $n \geq k$, if G is a simple n -vertex graph with no odd cycles of length less than k and with minimum degree $\delta(G) > 2n/k$, then G is bipartite.*

2 Forbidden graphs with chromatic number at least 4

In this section we prove Theorem 1. We assume throughout that $n = qr + s$, where q is an integer and $0 \leq s \leq r - 1$ holds.

Proof of Part (i)

Whenever n is a multiple of r , the equality $\text{rex}(n, K_{r+1}) = \text{ex}(n, K_{r+1})$ is clear because the r -partite Turán graph $T_{n,r}$ is regular in all such cases.

Proof of Part (ii)

First we argue that $\text{ex}(n, K_{r+1}) - \text{rex}(n, K_{r+1})$ is at least a linear function of n if r does not divide n . We see from Turán's theorem that the degree of regularity cannot exceed $(1 - 1/r)n$ if the graph is K_{r+1} -free. For $n = qr + s$ with $0 < s < r$ it means that the degrees are at most $n - (n + r - s)/r$. This value is the degree of vertices in the s larger classes of the Turán graph; but the $r - s$ smaller classes consist of vertices of degree $n - (n + r - s)/r + 1$. Hence the degree sum in a regular graph is smaller by at least $\frac{r-s}{r}n - O(1)$.

Next, we construct r -chromatic (hence also K_{r+1} -free) regular graphs to show that the difference between $\text{ex}(n, K_{r+1})$ and $\text{rex}(n, K_{r+1})$ is at most $O(n)$. For $n = qr + s$ with $0 < s < r$ the Turán graph has s classes of size $q + 1$ and $r - s$ classes of size q . Putting this in another way, the vertices in s classes have degree $n - q - 1$, and in $r - s$ classes have degree $n - q$.

We are going to delete $O(n)$ edges and obtain a regular graph. For this purpose we shall use Dirac's theorem [5] as a lemma, which states that if the degree of every vertex in a graph H is at least half of the number of vertices, then H has a Hamiltonian cycle.

Assume first that both s and $r - s$ are at least 2. Since the degree sum is even, the total size of the odd-degree classes together is also even, and the subgraph induced by them is Hamiltonian. Hence the union of these classes admits a 1-factor, which we remove. If this is the larger degree, then we are done. Otherwise the subgraph induced by the larger degrees also has a Hamiltonian cycle, whose removal leaves a regular graph of degree $n - q - 2$.

Assume next that $s = 1$; i.e., only one class contains vertices of low degree. If the total size of the $r - 1$ high-degree classes is even, we remove a 1-factor from the subgraph induced by them, and we are done. On the other hand, if their total size is odd, their degree must be even. That is, both q

and $r - 1$ are odd; in particular, $r - 1 \geq 3$ holds. In this situation our plan is to delete two edges from each such vertex, and one edge from each vertex of the low-degree class.

We begin with the single class, which has odd size. We omit one edge from each of its vertices — mutually disjoint edges — in such a way that the other ends of those $q + 1$ edges are distributed as equally as possible among the $r - 1 \geq 3$ high-degree classes. Then Dirac's condition is valid for the high-degree ends of the omitted matching and also for the subgraph from which no edges have been omitted so far. Hence both parts are Hamiltonian. Since $q + 1$ is even, we can omit a perfect matching from the former, and a Hamiltonian cycle from the latter, thus obtaining a regular graph.

Finally, consider the case of $s = r - 1$; i.e., only one class contains vertices of high degree. We must remove edges from the high-degree class, which means that also some low-degree vertices will decrease their degree. Similarly to the previous case, here again, the parity of classes will matter.

If the high-degree class has even size q , we decrease its degrees by 3, distributing the neighbors equally among the low-degree classes, and inside the neighbors we delete a 1-factor. In the rest of low-degree vertices we delete a Hamiltonian cycle.

Suppose that the high-degree class has odd size q . Then the number of low-degree vertices is even because each such class has even size $q + 1$. In particular, n is odd. We now delete two edges from each high-degree vertex, this decreases $2q$ of the low degrees by 1. From the other $n - 3q$ (i.e., even number of) vertices we delete a 1-factor which exists since also this subgraph is Hamiltonian. This modification yields a regular graph, and completes the proof.

Proof of Part (iii)

Recall that the number of classes of high-degree vertices in the Turán graph is $r - s$, and these classes have cardinality q each. Note further that their union induces a Hamiltonian subgraph whenever $s \leq r - 2$. Under the assumption that at least one of $r - s$ and q is even, the length $(r - s)q$ of a corresponding Hamiltonian cycle is even, hence contains a perfect matching, say M . Removing M from $T_{n,r}$ we obtain a K_{r+1} -free regular graph, and the degree is largest possible, according to the first part of the proof of (ii) as given above.

Proof of Part (iv)

The r -colorable construction given above for (ii) proves that $\text{rex}(n, F)$ is at least $\text{ex}(n, K_{r+1}) - O(n)$ if $\chi(F) = r + 1$. On the other hand, as mentioned already, $\text{ex}(n, F) = (1 + o(1)) \text{ex}(n, K_{r+1})$ is valid by the Erdős–Stone theorem, implying that $\text{rex}(n, F)$ cannot be larger.

Proof of Part (v)

The following list is a summary of optimal constructions according to $n \pmod{3}$.

- $n = 3k$ — the complete 3-partite graph with equal classes, i.e. $T_{n,3}$, is regular.
- $n = 3k + 1$ — here $T_{n,3}$ has vertex classes of respective sizes $k, k, k + 1$; it can be made regular by removing a perfect matching between the two classes of size k .
- $n = 3k + 2$ — here $T_{n,3}$ has vertex classes of respective sizes $k, k + 1, k + 1$; it can be made regular by removing a matching of k edges between the class of size k and each class of size $k + 1$ (hence removing kP_3 from $T_{n,3}$), moreover deleting the edge that joins the two vertices whose degree has not been decreased by the removal of the two matchings. This is optimal because removing an edge from a vertex of high degree decreases the degree of a vertex of low degree, too.

3 3-chromatic forbidden graphs

Let us begin this section with the proof of Proposition 1, as it is applicable for Theorems 2 and 3 as well.

Proof of Proposition 1

Certainly we have $\text{rex}(n, F^+) \geq \text{rex}(n, F)$. Suppose that G is a regular graph of order n , which is extremal for F^+ . If G is F -free, then the reverse inequality $\text{rex}(n, F^+) \leq \text{rex}(n, F)$ also holds and the assertion follows immediately. On the other hand, if $F \subset G$ but $F^+ \not\subset G$, the degree of regularity in G must be smaller than $|V(F^+)|$, for otherwise it would be possible to extend F to F^+ in G . This fact puts a $O(n)$ upper bound on $|E(G)|$, contradicting

the superlinear growth of $\text{rex}(n, F)$. Thus the largest F^+ -free regular graphs are F -free, too, as n gets large.

Proof of Theorem 3, general lower bound

We construct a graph of order n and odd girth $g + 2$, hence it will not contain F as a subgraph. Let us write n in the form $n = (g + 2) \cdot a + 2b$ where b is an integer in the range $0 \leq b \leq g + 1$. We start with a blow-up of $C_{g+2} = v_1 v_2 \dots v_{g+2}$ by substituting independent sets A_1, A_2, \dots, A_{g+2} into its vertices, completely joining A_i with A_{i+1} for $i = 1, \dots, g + 2$ (where $A_{g+3} := A_1$). We let $|A_1| = |A_2| = a + b$, and $|A_i| = a$ for all $3 \leq i \leq g + 2$. The degree of a vertex v in this graph is $2a + b$ if $v \in A_1 \cup A_2 \cup A_3 \cup A_{g+2}$, and it is $2a$ otherwise. The graph is regular if $b = 0$, and it will be made regular by the removal of

$$2ab + b^2 = b \left(\frac{2n - 4b}{g + 2} + b \right) = \frac{b \cdot (2n + (g - 2)b)}{g + 2} \leq 2n - \frac{2n - (g - 2)(g + 1)^2}{g + 2}$$

edges otherwise.

Between A_{g+2} and A_1 we remove a bipartite graph H such that all vertices of H in A_{g+2} have degree b , and all degrees in A_1 are $\lfloor \frac{ab}{a+b} \rfloor$ or $\lceil \frac{ab}{a+b} \rceil$. Such H clearly exists. We also remove a bipartite graph isomorphic to H between A_2 and A_3 , such that the degree- a vertices are in A_3 .

If ab is a multiple of $a + b$, then the current vertex degrees in $A_1 \cup A_2$ are $2a + b - \frac{ab}{a+b} = 2a + \frac{b^2}{a+b}$. Then removing a regular bipartite graph of degree $\frac{b^2}{a+b}$, hence with b^2 edges, yields a $(2a)$ -regular graph of order n .

Otherwise, if ab is not divisible by $a + b$, we first remove a perfect matching between the vertices of degree $2a + b - \lfloor \frac{ab}{a+b} \rfloor$ in $A_1 \cup A_2$. After that, the bipartite graph induced by $A_1 \cup A_2$ is regular, hence deleting a regular subgraph of degree $b - \lceil \frac{ab}{a+b} \rceil$ from it, we obtain a $(2a)$ -regular graph of order n .

Proof of Theorem 3 for asymptotics of C_5 and unicyclic graphs

We have to prove that $\text{rex}(n, F) \leq n^2/7$, if n is not very small. By Proposition 1 it is enough to deal with the case of $F = C_5$. Let G be a C_5 -free regular graph with $\text{rex}(n, C_5)$ edges. If G is triangle-free, the proof is done by Theorem 5, because the odd girth cannot be exactly 5. On the other hand it was proved in [9, Lemma 33] that if G contains a triangle and the degrees are greater than $(1/6 + \epsilon)n$, for any $\epsilon > 0$ and sufficiently large

n , then G also has a C_5 . Hence in C_5 -free graphs with triangles we cannot have more than $n^2/12 + o(n^2)$ edges.

We postpone the proof of the exact formula for $\text{rex}(n, C_5)$ to the end of this paper, due to its similarity to the argument concerning $\text{rex}(n, C_3)$.

Proof of Theorem 2, Parts (i) and (ii)

If F is 3-chromatic and n is even, the lower bound of $n^2/4$ is shown by the complete bipartite graph $K_{n/2, n/2}$, while an asymptotic upper bound follows by the Erdős–Stone theorem as

$$\text{rex}(n, F) \leq \text{ex}(n, F) = (1 - o(1)) \text{ex}(n, K_3) = n^2/4 + o(n^2).$$

The tight results $\text{rex}(n, K_3) = \text{rex}(n, K_4 - e) = n^2/4$ follow from the facts that the Turán number of K_3 and also of $K_4 - e$ is $n^2/4$.

Assume that n is odd. The lower bound $\text{rex}(n, K_3) \geq n^2/5 - O(n)$ is a particular case of the previous construction, putting $g = 3$. Moreover, in triangle-free regular graphs we cannot have more than $n^2/5$ edges, due to Theorem 4 and by the fact that every regular bipartite graph has an even order. This already settles the case of K_3 (and also of the unicyclic graphs having a 3-cycle). For $K_4 - e$ assume that x, y, z induce K_3 . If this triangle cannot be extended to $K_4 - e$, then the degree of x, y, z is at most $2 + (n - 3)/3 = n/3 + 1$, thus by the condition of regularity the number of edges is at most $n^2/6 + n/2$, which is much less than $n^2/5$ if n is large.

Proof of Theorem 2, Part (iii)

Let G be a triangle-free regular graph on n vertices, with $|E(G)| = \text{rex}(n, K_3)$. Assume that $n = 5k + s$, where $s = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$ and n is odd. As a consequence, $k + s$ is odd as well; however, the degree d of regularity must be even. From Theorem 4 we also know that $d \leq \lfloor 2n/5 \rfloor = 2k + \lfloor 2s/5 \rfloor$. A more careful look verifies that the last term $\lfloor 2s/5 \rfloor$ will vanish with respect to d , and in every possible case we have

$$d \leq 2k = 2(n - s)/5.$$

This is clear for $s = 0, 1, 2$ due to the floor function. But also for $s = 3, 4$ we have that $\lfloor 2s/5 \rfloor = 1$ is an odd number, whereas d must be even, hence d cannot exceed the largest even integer under $2k + 1$, which is actually $2k$. Thus, $|E(G)| \leq kn$.

It remains to show that for every odd $n = 5k + s$ there exists a K_3 -free graph of order n which is $2k$ -regular. The general principle of the construction is to substitute independent sets A_1, \dots, A_5 into the vertices of C_5 , where each edge of C_5 becomes a complete bipartite graph between the corresponding two sets A_i, A_{i+1} cyclically; and then delete some edges so that a regular graph is obtained. We are going to describe these constructions for each s one by one, specifying the sequences $(|A_1|, \dots, |A_5|)$ as follows.

- $s = 0$: $(|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|) = (k, k, k, k, k)$

This graph is $2k$ -regular.

- $s = 1$: $(|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|) = (k + 1, k + 1, k, k - 1, k)$

This graph becomes $2k$ -regular after the deletion of a perfect matching from the induced subgraph $G[A_1 \cup A_2]$.

- $s = 2$: $(|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|) = (k + 1, k + 1, k, k, k)$

This graph becomes $2k$ -regular after the deletion of a matching of size k from $G[A_1 \cup A_5]$ and from $G[A_2 \cup A_3]$, moreover the edge between the two unmatched vertices of $A_1 \cup A_2$.

- $s = 3$: $(|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|) = (k + 1, k + 1, k + 1, k, k)$

This graph becomes $2k$ -regular after the deletion of a perfect matching from each of the induced subgraphs $G[A_1 \cup A_2]$, $G[A_2 \cup A_3]$, $G[A_4 \cup A_5]$.

- $s = 4$: $(|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|) = (k + 2, k + 2, k, k, k)$

This graph can be made $2k$ -regular in the following way. Specify two vertices $a'_1, a''_1 \in A_1$ and $a'_2, a''_2 \in A_2$; set $A'_1 = A_1 \setminus \{a'_1, a''_1\}$ and $A'_2 = A_2 \setminus \{a'_2, a''_2\}$. Delete a 2-factor from $G[A'_1 \cup A_5]$ and from $G[A'_2 \cup A_3]$; and delete the edges of the 4-cycle $a'_1 a'_2 a''_1 a''_2$.

Proof of Theorem 3 for exact $\text{rex}(n, C_5)$

Since the proof is very similar to that of the exact formula for $\text{rex}(n, K_3)$, we give a more concise description here. Let now $n = 7k + s$, where $0 \leq s \leq 6$. We have already seen that the degree d of regularity satisfies $d \leq \lfloor 2n/7 \rfloor = 2k + \lfloor 2s/7 \rfloor \leq 2k + 1$; and d must be even, thus $d \leq 2k$. It remains to give suitable substitutions of sets A_1, \dots, A_7 into the vertices of C_7 in such a way that the graphs can be made $2k$ -regular by the deletion of some edges. Below

we define a sequence $|A_1|, |A_2|, |A_3|, |A_4|, |A_5|, |A_6|, |A_7|$ similar to the case of C_5 , now for each $s = 0, 1, \dots, 6$.

- $s = 0$: k, k, k, k, k, k, k
Nothing to delete.
- $s = 1$: $k + 1, k, k, k + 1, k, k - 1, k$
Delete a 1-factor from $G[A_2 \cup A_3]$.
- $s = 2$: $k + 1, k + 1, k, k, k, k, k$
Delete a matching of size k from $G[A_1 \cup A_7]$ and from $G[A_2 \cup A_3]$, and the edge between the two unmatched vertices of $A_1 \cup A_2$.
- $s = 3$: $k + 1, k + 1, k, k, k + 1, k, k$
Delete a 1-factor from $G[A_1 \cup A_2]$, from $G[A_3 \cup A_4]$, and from $G[A_6 \cup A_7]$.
- $s = 4$: $k + 2, k + 2, k, k, k, k, k$
Delete the edges of a $H \cong C_4$ in $A_1 \cup A_2$, and a 2-factor from $G[(A_1 \cup A_7) \setminus V(H)]$ and from $G[(A_2 \cup A_3) \setminus V(H)]$.
- $s = 5$: $k + 2, k + 2, k, k, k + 1, k, k$
Delete a C_4 from $G[A_1 \cup A_2]$, and a matching of size k from each consecutive pair of A_i, A_{i+1} along the cycle (also including A_7, A_1 as cyclically consecutive), except $G[A_4 \cup A_5]$ and $G[A_5 \cup A_6]$.
- $s = 6$: $k + 2, k + 2, k, k, k + 2, k, k$
Delete a 2-factor from $G[A_1 \cup A_2]$, from $G[A_3 \cup A_4]$, and from $G[A_6 \cup A_7]$.

After the deletions, all graphs are $2k$ -regular, completing the proof of the theorem.

Acknowledgements. We thank Dániel Gerbner, Balázs Patkós, and Máté Vizer for discussions during the preparation of this manuscript.

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